

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE/CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT
PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

January 24, 2003

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held on Friday, January 24, 2003 at the Richmond Police Training Academy in Richmond.

Members Present

Fred Orelove, Chair
Sharon England
Patrick Kelleher
Alice Koenig
Mindy Loiselle
Eric Olsen
Pat Romano
Ruth Stone, Vice-Chair

Members Not Present

Mary Evans
A. Michael Hall
Kent Hymel

DCJS Staff Present

Claudia Aguilar
Denise Marks
Laurel Marks
Holly Oehrlein
Melissa O'Neill

The Chairman opened the meeting and asked if anyone had changes to the minutes from the October 25th meeting. One change was noted: Eric Olsen was left off as an attendee. Pat Kelleher motioned to approve the minutes. Eric Olsen seconded. Hearing no objections, the minutes were approved with amendment.

Introductions

Laurel Marks introduced herself as the Interim Section Chief replacing Fran Ecker, due to re-organization at DCJS. Ms. Marks told the committee a little about herself and advised that Fran Ecker is now the Interim Division Director, supervising the Crime Prevention/Law Enforcement, Juveniles Services, Correctional Unit Services and Victims Services Sections.

The Committee Members and other guests then introduced themselves.

Citizen Review Panel

This group agreed to serve as one of three groups acting as a Citizen Review Panel for the Child Protective Services section of the Department of Social Services. Recently the group has felt the need to explore what its obligations as a Citizen Review Panel are. A document was distributed to members prior to the meeting describing the role and function of a Citizen Review Panel. Citizen Review Panels are designed to look at three areas: ensure compliance with the state CAPTA plan, ensure that compliance

with the coordination of Title IV-E foster care & adoption systems and review the process for child fatalities.

The group considered the information provided in a discussion on how to proceed as a Citizen Review Panel. A suggestion was made that the members review the state CAPTA plan. One Committee member inquired whether the committee might want to look at the role of relative placements and follow up services as it relates to the CAPTA plan. It was also suggested that perhaps the committee could examine the overlap of domestic violence as it relates to the Differential Response System. Further discussion was held regarding the implementation of the Differential Response System. The Committee decided that it would like to review the state CAPTA plan and explore the implementation of DRS. A request was made to have copies of the research reports that were done on the original DRS pilot sites.

GAL Study Update

The Advisory Committee was updated on the GAL study. The Study Committee has not published a report, but did make some recommendations. Included was the recommendation that GAL's should not make home visits. Further, a recommendation was made regarding invoices over \$500 being itemized. Finally, the Study Committee recommended that the Standards for Guardians ad Litem developed by the Virginia Bar Association be adopted. The Standards have been approved and accepted by the Supreme Court. The Virginia Bar Association is reconvening on 1-27-03 to look at developing similar standards for Guardians ad Litem in custody cases. The first set of standards were only for child abuse cases.

There is legislation (SB 825) proposed to give courts the authority to appoint Guardians Ad Litem in certain types of cases (CHINs, Delinquency, etc.). The bill came about in response to an Attorney General Opinion that the court could not appoint GALs in certain situations. The bill has passed through the Senate.

Legislative Update

A list of bills that could be of interest to the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee was distributed. A brief description of each bill was given.

A few of the bills generated some discussion, which is included below.

The Committee was advised to review the full text of Senate Bill 1011 on the Internet. This bill (as well as four others listed on the handout provided) pertains to mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. These bills would require any regular minister, priest, rabbi, or accredited practitioner, including a duly accredited Christian Science practitioner, to report suspected child abuse or neglect to a local Department of Social Services. Discussion took place as to whether this would affect information unveiled during a "confidential" type conversation (confessional). This bill has made it through the House and was communicated to the Senate.

House Bill 2332: Criminal background check screening for employment. This bill would eliminate the preclusion of those convicted of committing barrier crimes from being employed in child care, adult care, education, nursing, mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse fields. Some barrier crimes include sexual assault and certain crimes involving children. This bill would allow the hiring entity to make the determination whether the applicants are suitable for hire, despite the conviction.

A question was raised whether the Advisory Committee can take positions on bills and lobby. Clearly the staff members of the Advisory Committee cannot lobby. The Advisory Committee was informed that the staff may be asked to draft Legislative Action Summaries on certain bills. Constituent input is always

sought and the Advisory Committee members could be called on at anytime to review a bill and provide input.

Finally, there was some discussion of bills requiring fees for people initiating custody and visitation cases in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations court. The House Bill requires a \$45.00 fee and the Senate Bill has a \$10.00 fee. The Supreme Court is endorsing the Senate Bill with the lower fee.

New Business

A Committee member advised the group that the “Just Children” project in Charlottesville is offering training to foster parents and workers on accessing special education programming for children. Andrew K. Block, Jr. from Charlottesville-Albemarle Legal Aid Society is the Legal Director for the project. Staff noted that there are extra copies of the materials provided to CASA program staff from the spring training that was held on the same subject.

CASA Program Update

The state funding for the CASA program sustained a 13.8% reduction in the current fiscal year and will have a 15% reduction next year. The Governor’s proposed budget does not reduce funding further. DCJS has successfully written a Byrne grant to help local CASA programs sustain these cuts for this year. The Vice-Chair, Ruth Stone, requested that the minutes reflect how much the CASA Programs appreciate all the effort that Melissa O’Neill and Fran Ecker put forth to make this happen.

The biennial Statewide CASA conference took place at the Ramada Plaza Resort in Virginia Beach on November 8th and 9th. There was a record registration with 318 participants. Evaluations of each session and the conference overall were compiled. The response was excellent and the keynote speakers, Jane Malpass and Jane Thompson from North Carolina and Sarah Buell from Texas were especially well received.

The Virginia CASA Association is officially dissolving. There will no longer be a two-state organization model in Virginia. This process will be complete by the end of this fiscal year.

Bob Holet, the COMET Senior Programmer Analyst, has successfully designed and distributed the COMET Statistical Report and is working on an upgrade at the present time. The update will make the VOCA reporting application part of COMET reports. Eighteen programs are currently using COMET. A COMET training took place in Southwest Virginia with five programs attending. Staff advised that Mr. Holet was asked to present the work he has done for Virginia at the National CASA State Directors meeting last fall.

A statistical fact sheet was distributed to the Advisory Committee members. At the time the report was printed, we were missing information from 3 localities. An updated copy will be distributed to the Advisory Committee once all numbers have been updated. The percentage of state funding for CASA programs has remained at 23% for approximately 4 years. There was a request for a report that included information from the past 4 years. This will be compiled and provided to the Committee.

CJA Program Update

Three Year Plan - Copies of this plan were distributed prior to the meeting. The Advisory Committee went through the plan reviewing the status of implementation of the various recommendations.

The "Improving Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse" conference was held in Roanoke and Charlottesville last year. Planning for this year's conferences is underway. They are planned for Richmond and Williamsburg. One speaker has been confirmed. He will be speaking about the use of anatomical dolls and responding to legal challenges.

The John Reid & Associates, Inc., "Child Abuse Seminar" took place in Virginia Beach, November 12 – 14, 2002. The conference went very well. The next one will not take place until 2004.

The Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse curriculum is still undergoing revisions. Updates of the modules were provided to instructors, but minimal feedback has been received. A physical abuse curriculum will not be developed until after the sexual abuse curriculum is updated.

The Three Year Plan includes provision of speakers for the Commonwealth's Attorney's Spring Institute. However, the speakers had already been selected for 2003 before we were able to offer assistance. The Commonwealth's Attorney's Services Council has applied to the Children's Justice Act program for funds to conduct a week-long trial advocacy course for new prosecutors in June, 2003. The focal case will be a child abuse case, specifically a shaken baby case.

The Forensic Medical Work Group will meet next month. That group is continuing its efforts to develop a curriculum to train physicians on recognizing and reporting suspected abuse and neglect. The PowerPoint program developed by Pennsylvania is being adapted for Virginia. This should be completed in the Spring.

The second group of participants in the "Child Sexual Abuse Case Consultation Project" completed training in August. Although feedback was very good, logistical considerations will make it impossible to offer the program again this year. The next offering will probably be in January or September 2004. Everyone that completed the program successfully has been contacted and asked if they would like to be included in a directory that will be provided to the Dept. of Social Services personnel. This directory will describe the program and can be used by DSS staff looking for a therapist with training specific to children who have been sexually abused.

Pursuant to the Three Year Plan the Victim's section of DCJS was contacted regarding a presentation from their staff on the impact of domestic violence in abused children. No one was available at the time. DCJS staff will continue to try to arrange this presentation for the Advisory Committee.

As part of the process for developing the Three Year Plan, DCJS staff typically meet with representatives for the Chiefs of Police, Sheriffs, Commonwealth's Attorneys and Child Protective Services Workers. Staff did meet with the Executive Director of the Commonwealth's Attorneys Services Council but will not be able to meet with the other representatives until later.

DCJS staff and the consultant who works with multidisciplinary teams met with the Lynchburg team in November and teams in the New River Valley in December. A return visit to the New River Valley is scheduled for March. A visit to Culpeper is scheduled for January 31, 2003. Team Tune-Up conferences are still being offered, but have not yet been planned for 2003.

Minor amendments to the Three Year Plan were noted. For example, due to a recent name change, references to VIDD in the plan need to be changed to the Partnership for People with Disabilities.

The Committee was advised of the training dates for the "Abuse and Neglect of Children with Disabilities" curriculum. Advisory Committee members had some questions, such as whether there was a

charge for the training. Dr. Orelove agreed to provide answers to the Committee members' questions to staff.

New Business

The Department of Social Services is changing the process they use to administer grant funding. They will no longer be issuing contracts and will instead be asking for Requests for Applications. This process is yet to be finalized but will have an impact on CASA programs and other VOCA funding recipients.

The Committee requested that DCJS staff explore the possibility of utilizing the Richmond Police Training Academy for all future meetings of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee. The committee finds the location to be easy to access as well as having ample parking.

Lelia Hopper has been scheduled to come to the next meeting to discuss the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the provisions for children under the act once termination of parental rights has been achieved.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 1:40.